Critical Management Studies
Competitive Session

De(constructed) and reconstructed images of the workplace: a case from the edge of Tasmania.

Dr Ruth Barton

Centre for Sustainable Work and Organisation, RMIT University, Melbourne, Victoria.

Email: Ruth.Barton@rmit.edu.au

Professor George Cairns.

Centre for Sustainable Work and Organisation, RMIT University, Melbourne, Victoria.

Email: George.Cairns@rmit.edu.au

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ABSTRACT: *In this paper, we explore the different ways in which a former industrial complex at the heart of a remote community is remembered and represented both to the community members and to visitors. In considering the different modes through which memories are constructed, communicated, understood and valued, we posit that they transcend notions of singularity and linearity in space and time respectively.*

Keywords: Deindustrialisation, memory, Tasmania, regeneration, community, ruins.

For most of the 20th century Tasmania's economy was highly internationalised and rested on hydro-industrialisation, agriculture and resource extraction (Stratford, 2008). Since the mid-1960s there have been two narratives about Tasmania's economic direction. The first argues that Tasmania's small and remote nature make it vulnerable and it should therefore exploit its advantage in resource extractive industries. The second argues that these same forces make Tasmania resilient against the homogenising effects of economic globalisation and that Tasmania's advantage should be in eco-tourism, smart technologies and a green political economy (Stratford, 2008). These narratives have been played out on Tasmania's North West coast at Burnie's paper mill. Here, we discuss these narratives, neither as individual nor as inclusive, but as operating in a state of mutual (in)dependency, informed by Foucault's (1994) concepts of heterotopias and heterochronias.

RISE

From 1914 Tasmania's industrial history has been based on hydro-industrialisation where energy intensive heavy industry would be attracted to Tasmania by the offer of cheap electricity. This strategy attracted heavy industry such as Electrolytic Zinc in Hobart and Associated Pulp and Paper Mills (APPM) and Tioxide at Burnie. APPM was part of the Collins House group of companies and in 1936 bought a 170 hectare waterfront site in Burnie (Brand Tasmania, 2010) and constructed buildings that dwarfed any other buildings in the town. Into these buildings, the company installed

paper machine Number 1, the largest fine printing paper machine in the British Empire and, as the business expanded, subsequently built a second mill and a hardboard mill and installed more paper machines on the site (Edwards, 2006).

APPM transformed the town. Burnie grew from a town of 3,000 people that depended on sending farm produce and mining materials out through its port to a major industrial town of 10,000 in 1945 and 20,000 in 1988 when it was awarded city status (Jamieson, 2011). The Collins House group took an avid interest in industrial welfarism and a paternalistic approach to their workforce and in 1943 constructed a Services Building to provide worker amenities. The mill drew much of its workforce from the broader North West coast and was major employer of women employing 400 women in the Finishing Room inspecting the paper quality and counting the paper into reams (Pink, 2000; Jamieson, 2011). As the town's dominant employer the mill was closely integrated into the community. Brothers and sisters, fathers and sons all worked there. Pranks were played on apprentices, work relationships formed as were sexual ones between the men and the Finishing room women on piles of broken paper (Jamieson, 2011).

DECAY

By the 1950s the site had reached its development capacity (Pink, 2000) prompting APPM to build a particle board and coated paper mill at Wesley Vale near Devonport (Edwards, 2006). In the 1970s the Burnie mill employed 3,500 people but struggled to maintain profitability, hampered by its aging and, by global standards, low productivity paper machines, falling tariffs and relatively high labour requirements. APPM undertook a modernisation programme that assisted its profitability but resulted in job losses (Pink 2000; Jamieson, 2011). In 1983 the mining company North Broken Hill-Peko (NBH) made a successful takeover bid for the Burnie and Wesley Vale mills and then stripped millions of capital from the company and closed parts of the mills. Although production reached a record 130,000 tons employment fell to less than 1,300 people (Pink, 2000).

Although the almost continuous restructuring had been achieved with union cooperation, the pace of change had been too slow for management's liking (Tierney 1999; Thompson, 1992; Pink, 2000). NBH had been associated with de-unionisation activities in its mining operations and in 1992 maintained its 'right to manage' by announcing a series of reductions in pay, conditions and union rights (Tierney, 1999; Baker, 2008). The workforce took industrial action, a move that initially attracted widespread community support (Tierney 1999; Baker, 2008) but increasingly divided the town, until NBH and the ACTU brokered a deal (Pink 2000; Medwin, 2009).

NBH continued to invest in the mill and a year after the dispute the workforce was down to 700 people and productivity had increased by 30%. In 1993 NBH sold the mills to Amcor and, despite community protests, there were progressive closures of parts of the mills and further restructuring and job losses (Pink, 2000; GHD 2010). In 2009, after an unsuccessful attempt to sell the mills, the Wesley Vale mill closed and 2010 the Burnie mill closed with the loss of the final 270 jobs (Ford, 2010; Clydesdale, 2010). Some workers were pessimistic about finding new jobs on the north-west coast, but were confident that Burnie would survive without the mill. Others, such as CFMEU Pulp and Paper state secretary Ken Fraser were less sure, reminiscing that "Burnie was built around the mill – the mill was Burnie" (Clydesdale, 2010).

DERELICTION

Memories and the past have been challenging for Tasmanian people. Daniels (1983) argues that Tasmanian society sees its convict past as a shameful inheritance and that this past "which is too awful to contemplate" (1983: 3) must be turned into an asset and a spectacle that will create employment and make income and profits. She argues that in Tasmania there is a wish to destroy the physical remains of the convict past as a way of wiping out the past itself. Daniels (1983) argues that the case of Port Arthur and the way it has been preserved and depicted has prevented it from providing an historical experience "much less a radicalising experience which could come from an imaginative opening up of the real relevance of Port Arthur to the present" (Daniels, 1983: 8). What is

preserved and the manner that it is preserved or what is not preserved, can act to suppress any sense of the economy it was part of and quarantine the past and the present (Daniels, 1983). We can see similarities between this and the demolition and preservation of the industrial landscape in Burnie.

High and Lewis (2007) suggest that one of the functions of abandoned industrial buildings is that they act as a testimony of the powerlessness of working people to influence or control the process of deindustrialisation and have symbolic and cultural significance But this has not always been the case with factories seen as symbols of order and progress and invoking a particular way of life and a specific economic and cultural order. Certainly we can see this in Burnie with APPM's contribution to the town's economy and employment and its paternalistic approach invoking a sense of progress and a unity of purpose between capital and labour. High and Lewis (2007) argue industry closure is seen as representing a natural aspect of capitalism and blame for the closures sheeted home to the people of the region. They suggest a celebration of post–industrial society and green sensibilities have anaesthetised the middle class to industrial decline. Indeed we can see this in the case of Burnie where the workers and their proclivity to strike (Jamieson, 2011) and the Greens and their environmental policies have been blamed for the mills' closure and Tasmania's economic malaise (Pilkington, 2009).

In early 2012 demolition commenced on 52 buildings on the mill site (The Advocate, 2012). The demolition was couched in terms of the site having being in the 1990s at the centre of a bitter industrial dispute and of the deserted plant starting to become an eyesore (Kempton, 2012). The only buildings retained were the administration and service blocks. The first business to build on the site will be the hardware chain Bunnings (Ford, 2012). High and Lewis (2007: 9) argue that industrial ruins are "memory places" that make us reflect and remember and in this way act as "symbolic sites of identity for those workers who have come to identify with their displacement". Mah (2010) argues that industrial ruins are "wasted places" left behind by the uneven nature of capitalist development and are produced by capital abandonment of sites of industrial production. She argues (Mah, 2010) that they can be seen as the footprint of capitalism, as places that are no longer profitable or have use value.

High and Lewis (2007) argue that the demolition of former industrial buildings that formed a significant presence in the landscape reinforces the idea that the industrial age is ending and a transition to the post industrial age occurring. Reactions to the demolition of buildings can be divided – for some it represents the march of progress while for others it signifies the end of relationships to people, place and working class identity (High and Lewis, 2007). There is some sense of this in Burnie where the soon to be demolished mill was described as a vast complex of 20th Century Modernist buildings and that "Upon entering the township of Burnie, there is a sense that you've been taken back to a time when industry was king. Before you even get close to the vast complex as you snake your way along highway by the ocean, the immense size of some of its buildings loom large, including the chimney stack that keeps a watchful eye over the entire site" (Ryan, 2012). Mah (2010: 405) argues that working class people saw industrial buildings as the "cathedrals of the working classes" and lamented their destruction. A photographer taking photos of their mill buildings prior to their demolition recounted "I had many people talk to me about how they used to work at the Mill and that they thought it would be their employment for life. One elderly man who had worked on the site for 35 years told me stories of times gone by and pointed out what the uses of the buildings were for, and then as he was about to carry on with his walk, he said "better get those photos before it all goes"" (Ryan, 2012).

Deindustrialisation can be presented as natural and part of an historic process rather than being a political and economic choice. This makes the profound changes brought about by deindustrialisation seem inevitable and irresistible and, according to Frisch (1998: 247) proffers "acceptance and transcendence focused on the pastness of the past … and the past-free-ness of the future". This privileges the notion of discontinuity and opens up the beguiling notion of post-industrialism. But industrial heritage brings with it a sense of continuity and of conflict and choice, economic change and social experience and the relationship of workers and their families to the dynamics of power. It brings with it a sense of continuity of work as the foundation for reconstruction and is often concerned with imagining and constructing new and more modern webs of relationships

that generated the economic growth, identity and cohesion of industrial communities (Frisch, 1998). Drawing on the work of Doreen Massey (1984), High and Lewis (2007) argue that the meaning and memory of deindustrialisation has politics and that the politics of remembering are a product of local social relations and broader social, economic, cultural and political forces. Explanations of closures are often rooted in vague terms where closures are seen as inevitable and devoid of agency. Community and union attempts to forestall or resist closures are depicted as swimming against the tide of progress.

High and Lewis (2007) argue that when people invoke place they are imagining geography and creating identities. While elite buildings are often preserved, this is not the case with former industrial buildings where attempts to find support have foundered on lack of public support and the difficulties of overcoming economic and environmental obstacles. This has occurred at Burnie where the industrial buildings where blue collar work was performed were demolished while the services and administration buildings have been retained and the houses APPM built for its managerial staff awarded heritage status (GHD, 2010). As High and Lewis (2007: 30) argue, proposals to preserve such buildings are "usually judged on their tourism potential as part of a town's efforts to retool for the post-industrial era". We can see this in Burnie where Mayor Kons said "The pulp and paper mill represented a fantastic era in Burnie but it is time to move on. Re-using a site that was going to end up derelict is a sign of the city's new future" (Kempton, 2012). Unencumbered by the symbols of the past, towns are now free to move into a "golden post-industrial future" (High and Lewis, 2007: 34).

Overton (2007) argues that the neo-liberal influenced policies of federal and provincial governments has contributed to deindustrialisation and thrown the responsibility of the consequences onto individuals and communities under the rhetoric of self-help and self-reliance. One response to these crises has been growing interest in developing an alternative economic base with tourism seen as a new industry with great potential which, Overton (2007) argues, is desperately grasped in the absence of any other alternatives. Indeed Burnie's Mayor has described the city as becoming a "tourism mecca" (Ford, 2013). But the appeal of tourism is often predicated on public interest in the

natural or built environment and it is as Overton (2007) suggests, one thing to declare public interest and another to "effectively protect from destruction what is deemed to be valuable" (Overton, 2007: 68).

There is often, High and Lewis (2007) suggest ambivalence by working people over the preservation of such buildings for although the factory scape might be kept, the jobs and the workplace cultures that the workers depended upon for status and solidarity are gone. The demolition of large industrial structures signals that a transformation is underway and, High and Lewis (2007: 39) argue, puts workers in their "place", a place that is on the margins of the "margins of local, regional, national and global culture". Deindustrialisation impacts on workers their families and communities in four ways (Frisch, 1998). First they have lost their jobs. Second they have lost their social place and status and can be seen as embarrassing reminders of the past. Third they are compelled to define themselves as placeless, "choosing between atomized survival elsewhere and a world of localized meaning and connection" (Frisch, 1998: 248). Last they are compelled to re-imagine what place means in a reconstructed economic and social landscape. They are, Frisch (1998) concludes, multiply displaced.

DISNEYFICATION

Although the industrial buildings have been demolished, the mill has been commemorated by the Pulp and Paper walk along the beach foreshore fronting the mill site. It is described as a gift to the community by Paperlinx, the mill's last owner. The 600 metre path represents a paper roll unravelling and is a "symbolic echo of The Pulp" and endorsed the Collins House industrial welfarism that gave many families in Burnie "a good start in life" (Haberle, 2013). However some who posted on a web site took a different perspective. One person, seeing the pictures of the Mills demolition, lamented that it was sad to see that there was no longer a use for a building that had created so much for an area. The website's owner (Haberle, 2013) countered that "the paper mill was supposed to close many

years before it did, we were actually lucky to have it as long as we did! But Burnie today is a very different city, industrial pollution is now a thing of the past…it's looking very beautiful".

DIS-PLACEMENTS IN SPACE AND TIME

The accounts of Burnie set out above do not provide a singular narrative of the city, the community and the mill. To some, they may be indicative of a binary division between those who lament the loss of an industrial past and the jobs associated with it and those who look to a post industrial future and new opportunities. However, as suggested by Mah (2020), Massey(1984) and High and Lewis (2007) above, we concur that there is a more complex and nuanced set of relationships at play here, where understandings of space, place and time are not so easily demarcated. Drawing upon Foucault's (1994) conceptualisations of heterochronia and heterotopia, we posit that understandings and interpretations of the geographical space; occupied so briefly in the larger scheme of things by a paper mill; of the community place within this, and of time itself are subject to multiple, complex and overlapping interpretations by the community – and by visitors to it. Here, space and place are multi-dimensional and time is not linear but folds on itself. In contrast to Frisch's (1998) notion of a "past-free-ness future", past and future are but constructed perspectives from the present.

Here, within the community of Burnie, the physical space in the present time remains occupied by the mill even as it has been stripped of it; the mill still exists and always will exist in the minds of some members as a utopian mirror on the past, as a new dystopian future unfolds. For Foucault (1994: 179), "(i)n the mirror see myself where I am not, in an unreal space that opens up virtually behind the surface; I am over there where I am not, a kind of shadow that gives me my own visibility, that enables me to look at myself where I am absent". He elaborates on the concept of the heterotopia as "a kind of contestation, both mythical and real, of the space in which we live" (p. 179). As such, for others the mill remains in memory as the concrete manifestation of an industrial dystopia that is replaced by a "very beautiful" new constructed Burnie – a new Burnie that can only exist in relation to the 'ugly' past.

Foucault outlines ‘six principles’ of heterotopias, ranging from the basic notion that they exist in all societies to a complex ambivalence in which he posits that, at one and the same time, they “presuppose a system of opening and closing that isolates them and makes them penetrable at the same time” (p.183). Hence, those who have worked in the mill in the past can still enter it in memory, but are excluded from it by its demolition. Similarly, the tourist to Burnie can access the mill through the displays that keep it alive in the space, but are excluded from the reality of its working days. This ambivalence of opening up whilst closing off is set within the temporal discontinuity in which the place accumulates indefinitely, “constituting a sort of general archive, the desire to contain all times, all ages, all forms, all tastes in one place… a kind of perpetual and indefinite accumulation of time in a place that will not move” (p182). As such, the place once filled by the physical presence of the mill remains occupied by it as memories and other representations of it, even as it is occupied by new forms of structure and activity.

Foucault’s final principle of heterotopias is that they “have a function in relation to the remaining space… creating a space of illusion that denounces all real space… (o)r, in the contrary, creating a different space, a different real space as perfect, as meticulous, as well-arranged as our is disorganized, badly arranged, and muddled” (p.184). In Burnie, the space of illusion can be seen in the sanitized ‘Disneyfication’ and the ‘symbolic echo’ of the new landscape and at the same time, rather than in the contrary, this new landscape within one part of Burnie can be considered as a perfect and meticulous space that sits in contrast to the messy reality of the lived space of the community around it.

Based upon these ideas from Foucault, we posit that understanding of the mill’s place in the community cannot be divided into a past that is gone and a future that is yet to unfold, defined in terms of beauty or ugliness, good or bad. Rather, the mill exists – and will continue to exist – only in multiple presents that look to and encapsulate both the past and the future at the same time and in the same space, with all the attributes of beauty, ugliness, pain, pleasure, regret and relief.

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